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POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS

Issues arising from the resolutions of the General Assembly at its forty-eighth and forty-ninth sessions, specifically calling for action by UNEP

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to Governing Council decision 10/1, section 1, of 31 May 1982, provides information on issues emanating from the resolutions of the forty-eighth and forty-ninth sessions of the United Nations General Assembly which are of relevance to UNEP. In areas where follow-up action to the resolution has not been indicated, this is provided in the reports of the Executive Director under the relevant agenda items.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to take note of the Executive Director's report and the actions indicated therein.

Issues arising from the resolutions of the General Assembly at its forty-eighth and forty-ninth sessions, specifically calling for action by UNEP

1. At its forty-eighth session the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/80 of 16 December 1993 entitled "Question of Antarctica", welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the state of the environment in Antarctica and requested the Secretary-General to explore the possibilities, within existing resources, of publishing, as official documents of the United Nations, extracts of data received from the various organizations in the preparation of future annual reports. Several operative paragraphs of resolution 48/80 deal with environmental issues. The General Assembly welcomed, inter alia, the commitment made by Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties under chapter 17 of Agenda 21 and as provided for in article III of the Antarctic Treaty. The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties are urged to build on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) agreements and in this connection consider organizing an annual seminar/symposium covering issues related to the environment, with the widest possible international participation, including that

* UNEP/GC.18/1.

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of international organizations such as the United Nations. The Consultative Parties are further urged to establish mechanisms to ensure compliance with the 1991 Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection.

2. In view of the increasing interest in the environmental aspects of the Antarctic, the greater recognition of the significant impact that it exerts on the global environment, and UNEP's wide experience of the environment and its contribution to Antarctic issues, UNEP subsequently accepted overall responsibility for the coordination of the work of the United Nations Secretariat on the Question of Antarctica as requested by the Secretary-General. This has entailed substantial new responsibilities for UNEP, addressing requests on behalf of the Secretary-General insofar as they are within the scope of the mandate of UNEP. UNEP has also, inter alia, coordinated the preparation of the Secretary-General's report on the state of the environment in Antarctica. All these tasks have to be discharged within existing resources.

3. The General Assembly, at its forty-ninth session, adopted resolution 49/80 of 15 December 1994, noting the role accorded by the Secretary-General to UNEP in relation to Antarctic matters and urging the Antarctic Treaty Parties to extend invitations to the Executive Director of UNEP to attend future consultative meetings in order to assist them in the substantive work. The resolution urged Antarctic Treaty Parties to take into account the outcome of UNCED, particularly chapter 17 of Agenda 21, ensure that data are freely available to the international community and enhance access of the international scientific community and United Nations specialized agencies to such information, including encouraging periodic seminars and symposia. The Antarctic Treaty Parties are urged also to make available information on Antarctica as a means of promoting public awareness of the importance of Antarctica to the global and regional environment, and become parties to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. The question of Antarctica will be included in the provisional agenda of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly in 1996. (See also programme elements 1.1.3, 3.3.2 and 5.1.1 of the Proposed Programme of Utilization of Resources of the Environment Fund for the Biennium 1996-1997, UNEP/GC.18/9; UNEP/GC.18/4, and UNEP/GC.18/8).

4. The General Assembly adopted resolution 48/38 on 10 December 1993 entitled "Effects of atomic radiation", which requested UNEP to continue providing support for the effective conduct of the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) and to assemble, study and disseminate information on observed levels of ionizing radiation and radioactivity in the environment, and on the effects of such radiation upon man and his environment. UNEP was further requested to continue providing support for the dissemination of UNSCEAR's findings to the General Assembly, the scientific community and the public. UNSCEAR was commended for its work and requested to continue the review of the important problems in the field of radiation and report thereon to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

5. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly considered the report prepared and submitted by UNSCEAR, as requested, and on 9 December 1994 adopted resolution 49/32 entitled "Effects of atomic radiation", which reiterated its request to UNEP to continue providing support for the effective conduct of the work of the Scientific Committee. The General Assembly took note with appreciation of the report, commended UNSCEAR on the valuable contribution it had been making, requested UNSCEAR to continue its work, endorsed its plans for its future activities, and requested UNSCEAR to report to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session (see also programme element 5.1 in UNEP/GC.18/9).

6. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, which established the Governing Council of UNEP; Governing Council decision 15/1, which reaffirmed the central role of UNEP as the central catalysing, coordinating and stimulating body within the United Nations system; decisions 16/6 and 16/1 concerning improving the facilities available at headquarters; paragraphs 38.21 and 38.23 of Agenda 21, which called for an enhanced role for UNEP and its Governing Council; and paragraphs 25, 26 and 32 (c) of General Assembly resolution 47/191 of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly on

21 December 1993 adopted resolution 48/174, entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme". In resolution 48/174 the Assembly endorsed the report of the Governing Council of UNEP on the work of its seventeenth session.

7. The resolution stressed the need for close cooperation between UNEP and the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) in the implementation of the recommendations of UNCED, in accordance with the relevant provisions of chapter 38 of Agenda 21, and requested the further strengthening of the liaison function at Nairobi for the CSD secretariat. In that regard, UNEP continues to collaborate closely with CSD and to participate actively in the CSD process, acting as Task Manager in several areas and making contributions to Task Manager reports in a number of other areas. In 1994, UNEP employed a full-time Professional staff member dealing exclusively with CSD and related matters to cater for the liaison function. In resolution 48/174 the General Assembly further welcomed the action-oriented approach of the Governing Council towards the implementation of Agenda 21. While noting with appreciation the efforts of the Executive Director to ensure that as many meetings as possible are held at headquarters, the need to rationalize meetings in Nairobi to facilitate economy was stressed. The Secretary-General was requested to report on the implementation of the resolution to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly in 1995 (see also the reports of the Executive Director on new developments in conference servicing, UNEP/GC.18/10; on the mercure satellite telecommunications system, UNEP/GC.18/21; and on environment and sustainable development, UNEP/GC.18/27).

8. The General Assembly, on 21 December 1993, adopted resolution 48/175 on "Drought and desertification", and recalled its appeals to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNEP to continue and strengthen their cooperation in combating desertification, notably through the support for the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) joint venture programme. The resolution further noted with satisfaction UNDP Governing Council decision 93/33 on the expanded role of UNSO and recommended that UNEP-UNDP cooperation ensured by the joint agreement to support UNSO in the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian region, in a manner consistent with the outcome of the future convention, be strengthened and enlarged to support UNSO in the context of implementing Agenda 21, but without prejudice to Sudano-Sahelian countries. With regard to the required reporting to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, it was decided that UNDP should be the lead agency with which UNEP is to cooperate.

9. General Assembly resolution 48/191 of 21 December 1993, on the "Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification particularly in Africa", noted the contribution of, inter alia, UNEP to the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INCD) in the conduct of its mandate and invited UNEP to continue to provide such support. The resolution urged INCD to complete its negotiations by June 1994. The Convention to Combat Desertification was subsequently adopted on 17 June 1994. The Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD) is the lead agency for follow-up, together with the regional commissions, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP and UNEP. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 49/234 of 23 December 1994 on the same subject, acknowledging with appreciation the support provided for the operation of the interim Convention secretariat during 1994 by UNEP, inter alia, and outlining functions and procedures for the continued work of INCD. The resolution further requested, inter alia, the United Nations system to take action for the prompt implementation of the Convention and its relevant regional annexes upon its entry into force and in this regard to respond effectively to the needs in the African, Asian and Latin American and Caribbean regions. The resolution also urged, inter alia, the United Nations system to take actions and measures for the full implementation of the provisions of INCD resolution 5/1 on urgent action for Africa, which specifically mentions UNEP. The resolution noted the contributions of, inter alia, UNEP to the work of the INCD in pursuance of its mandate and invited it to intensify and expand such support. The proposal of the UNDP

Administrator, following the adoption of the Convention and in conformity with paragraph 38.27 of Agenda 21, that the Programme support the implementation of the Convention worldwide, with particular attention to Africa, was welcomed and UNDP and UNSO were invited to seek the necessary financial resources and other forms of support to be able to play that role more effectively. The Secretary-General was requested to report to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session on the implementation of this resolution (see also programme elements 1.3 and 5.1.1 of UNEP/GC.18.9; and UNEP/GC/18/3).

10. The General Assembly, in resolution 48/192 of 21 December 1993, entitled "Strengthening international cooperation in the monitoring of global environmental problems", taking note of the Governing Council's decisions 16/37 on early warning and forecasting of environmental emergencies and 17/26 on the United Nations Centre for Urgent Environmental Assistance, and the relevant provisions of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, together with the reports of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space which noted the importance of remote sensing by satellites for monitoring the Earth's environment and for studying and monitoring global change, recognized the need to make Earthwatch a more efficient instrument for environmental sensing and assessment. The Executive Director of UNEP was requested to prepare and submit to the eighteenth session of the Governing Council a report on UNEP's activities in environmental monitoring, containing proposals and recommendations within the context of Agenda 21 and a review of Earthwatch, taking into account the decisions adopted by the Governing Council at its seventeenth session, in cooperation with relevant entities within the United Nations system and, where appropriate, outside the United Nations system. The Executive Director's report and proposals, entitled "Earthwatch, environment monitoring and assessment" (UNEP/GC.18/4) have been submitted for consideration by the Council under agenda item 5 (see also programme elements 1, 2, 3 and 5 of UNEP/GC.18/9).

11. In its resolution 49/111 of 19 December 1994, entitled "Report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on its second session", the General Assembly took note of the Commission's report and endorsed its recommendations. It underlined the importance of preparing and carrying out national sustainable development strategies, programmes and action plans and noted the ongoing work on the elaboration of sustainable development indicators. The General Assembly expressed its deep concern that the financial commitments were short of expectations and requirements, which would constrain the effective implementation of Agenda 21, and stressed the critical need for and importance of the provision of means of implementation, in particular to developing countries. The General Assembly also stressed the role of CSD in fostering multilateral negotiations and promoting action in the area of changing consumption and production patterns and noted the work done by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization (GATT/WTO), UNCTAD and UNEP in the fields of trade, environment and sustainable development. It underlined the need for close cooperation and complementarity with the work of CSD and recommended that CSD, UNCTAD, UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continue to be appropriately represented at the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment. The General Assembly also called upon CSD to develop close and clear relationships with other relevant intergovernmental organizations and entities, including the conferences of parties to the conventions on biological diversity, climate change and desertification and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The General Assembly further underlined the need for an effective follow-up to CSD decisions and noted the commitment of CSD members to follow up their inter-sessional activities in order to contribute to a comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in 1997 (see also programme elements 1, 2, and 5 of UNEP/GC.18/9; UNEP/GC.18/24; UNEP/GC.18/25; and UNEP/GC.18/27).

12. In its resolution 49/117 of 19 December 1994, entitled "Convention on Biological Diversity", the General Assembly welcomed the entry into force of the Convention and the convening of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. In the same resolution, the

General Assembly invited the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity to make available the results of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention as a contribution to the work of CSD at its third session and decided to consider at its fiftieth session the progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, the General Assembly invited the Executive Secretary of the Convention to report, through CSD and the United Nations Economic and Social Council, on the results of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. On the same day, the General Assembly also adopted resolution 49/119, entitled "International Day for Biological Diversity", in which it proclaimed 29 December, the date of the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity, International Day for Biological Diversity and requested the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UNEP to take all steps necessary to ensure the successful observance of the International Day (see also programme element 1.2 of UNEP/GC.18/9).

13. On 20 December 1994, the General Assembly adopted resolution 49/22, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction". In section B of that resolution, entitled "Early warning capacities of the United Nations system with regard to natural disasters", the General Assembly took into account existing early-warning capacities in the United Nations system, in particular within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, UNEP, the World Meteorological Organization, the World Health Organization and FAO, and requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fiftieth session on early-warning capacities in the United Nations system and to make proposals on improvement and better coordination in order to provide for an adequate response to natural disasters and similar disasters with an adverse impact on the environment. The Secretary-General was also requested to include in his report recommendations on the capacity of the United Nations system to coordinate information about natural and similar disasters with an adverse impact on the environment and to pass this on to regional, national and sectoral early-warning capacities (see also UNEP/GC.18/2; and programme element 3.3 of UNEP/GC.18/9).

14. The General Assembly also adopted the following resolutions of interest to the Governing Council of UNEP: resolution 49/114, "International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer", which proclaimed 16 September the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer; resolution 49/115, "Observance of World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought", which proclaimed 17 June the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought; and resolution 49/131, "Question of declaring 1998 International Year of the Ocean", which proclaimed 1998 International Year of the Ocean.

15. The General Assembly adopted at its forty-ninth session other resolutions of general relevance to the work of the UNEP Governing Council, inter alia, "Support for the Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) Programme" (49/112); "Dissemination of the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" (49/113); "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind" (49/120); "Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States" (49/123); "Fisheries bycatch and discards and their impact on the sustainable use of the world's living marine resources" (49/118); "United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks" (49/121); "Agenda for development" (49/126); and "Report of the International Conference on Population and Development" (49/128).